
Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Plan)

Sawtooth National Forest

Located In:

Cassia, Blaine, Boise, Camas, Custer, Elmore, Oneida, Power,
and Twin Falls Counties, Idaho; and Box Elder County, Utah

Responsible Agency:

USDA - Forest Service, Sawtooth National Forest

Responsible Official:

Jack G. Troyer, Intermountain Regional Forester

Recommending Official:

Ruth Monahan, Sawtooth NF Forest Supervisor

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Acronyms

ACS – Aquatic Conservation Strategy
AMS – Analysis of the Management Situation
BA – Biological Assessment
BMP – Best Management Practices
CFR – Code of Federal Regulations
DEIS – Draft Environmental Impact Statement
ESA – Endangered Species Act
FEIS – Final Environmental Impact Statement
HFI – Healthy Forest Initiative
IDEQ – Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
Infish—Interim Strategy for Managing Inland Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon
and Washington, Idaho, western Montana and Portions of Nevada
IRA – inventoried roadless areas
MPC – Management Prescription Category
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
NF – National Forest
NFMA – National Forest Management Act
NFP – National Fire Plan
NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOI – Notice of Intent (to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement)
Pacfish—Interim Strategy for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern
Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California
PNV – Present Net Value
RACR – Roadless Area Conservation Rule
Revised Plan – Revised Land and Resource Management Plan
ROD – Record of Decision
RPA – Resources Planning Act
TSPQ – Total Sale Program Quantity
USC – United States Code
USFWS – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Preface

The document you are about to read is called a Record of Decision or a “ROD.” It describes my decision to approve the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Sawtooth National Forest (NF) and why I made this choice. I felt a good way to describe my decision in this ROD would be an informal message to the people I work for – each and every American across this land. These are your National Forests and I thank you for your interest in them.

Specifically, this ROD has two purposes: First, it is a legal document detailing a formal decision from a government agency. Second, and equally important, it explains the “why” of that decision. It is my sincere desire that I speak clearly through this document. In those places where legal requirements make for difficult reading, I apologize.

My decision strikes a balance between competing demands expressed by many people. It addresses Americans’ needs and desires for this National Forest. Although this decision is mine, it has not been made alone. More than 3,500 comments were received during the development of the Revised Plan. These comments helped guide Sawtooth NF staff members as they developed the Revised Plan. This ROD and the supporting documents will shape the management of the Sawtooth NF for the next 10 to 15 years.

This revision process has been arduous, lengthy, and at times contentious. I want to sincerely thank all the people who participated in the process, especially those who became involved in the numerous collaborative efforts seeking solutions. In particular, this revision process is the culmination of years of collaboration and consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries, various agencies of the State of Idaho, and the Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes to develop a long-term Aquatic Conservation Strategy for conservation and recovery of listed fish species, as well as the restoration and maintenance of beneficial uses related to water quality and long-term soil productivity.

I want to make it clear that the Forest Service understands its special role in managing the National Forests. Through their representatives in Congress, Americans have told the Forest Service that the 191 million acres of their National Forests and Grasslands are to be managed with a multiple-use philosophy.

In recent years, many communities that are home to the National Forests have been undergoing a transformation. Economic conditions have required lumber mills, farms and ranches to become larger and more efficient. As this has occurred, more and more people are leaving rural communities. Yet, much of the local social fabric is rooted in small local operations with close ties to the National Forests. Many urban dwellers also look to the National Forests as places where they can reconnect with the natural environment.

The 1987 Forest Plan for the Sawtooth NF reflected the desires that the public had nearly 16 years ago when the primary focus was on what the land could produce. These desires have changed, and they will continue to change. Today’s focus is centered more on the condition of the land as a basis for providing multiple goods and services.

Much history remains to be written about the National Forests. These lands can help maintain a quality of life, both for the people who live and work on these lands, and for those interested in spending time visiting these American treasures. People come to the National Forests not only to seek solitude, but also to teach their children how to hike, camp, hunt and fish – to appreciate nature. The potential for outdoor recreation to help sustain local economies is great, as is the potential to continue the tradition of providing our children and future generations with special places to develop an appreciation of the natural resources of our country.

Recognizing that conditions on the National Forests do not remain static, that public desires change, and that new information is constantly being developed, the Revised Plan embraces an adaptive management approach. This means that as conditions change, so will the management plan. That is why there will be Forest Plan amendments that will, if you wish, involve you. Through both scientific research and talking to the people who use the Forests, I intend to keep the Revised Plan current in respect to the needs of people as well as nature's processes.

As I emphasized earlier, the National Forests are managed under a multiple-use concept. It is the job of the Forest Service to find a place on the National Forests for uses such as timber harvest, livestock grazing, outdoor recreation and mineral development, as well as habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species and lands for healthy, diverse vegetation and proper watershed function. That is not to say that each use can or should occur on every acre. The goal must be to blend the different uses in a way that is sustainable and best meets the needs of the American people.

“Sustainable” means satisfying present needs without compromising the needs of future generations. To achieve the goal of sustainability, the Revised Plan establishes goals and objectives that will provide for more diverse conditions than currently exist on the Forest. In some areas, processes such as fire, that are important in maintaining the overall health of the lands, will be reintroduced. In other areas intensive restoration and resource development will occur to provide for public use and the area’s economic health.

Throughout the development of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and the Revised Plan, I have asked for a Plan that is scientifically credible, sustainable, and legally sufficient but not burdened with excessive process requirements that do not contribute to good decisions. I believe the Revised Plan meets those criteria.

Thank you again for your interest in management of the Sawtooth NF.

JACK G. TROYER
Regional Forester
Intermountain Region, USDA – Forest Service

Forest Setting

The Sawtooth National Forest is located in south central Idaho, with a small parcel of land in northern Utah. The northern portion of the Forest is bordered on the west by the Boise National Forest and on the north and east by the Salmon-Challis National Forest. The Forest administers about 2.1 million acres of federal lands, including an estimated 218,000 acres in the Sawtooth Wilderness. Elevations vary greatly across the Forest, from 4,500 feet on Rock Creek near Twin Falls to over 12,000 feet atop Hyndman Peak east of Sun Valley. The Forest has an estimated 7,500 miles of perennial and intermittent streams, and 7,600 acres of lakes and reservoirs, and contains important portions of the Snake, Salmon, Sawtooth, Boise, and Big Wood River systems. The wide range of landforms, elevation, and climate across the Forest has produced a wide variety of vegetative conditions. The Forest provides habitat for close to 300 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians, and 29 species of fish.

The Sawtooth National Forest serves as an important recreation destination area in the State of Idaho, as well as the nation. Recreation and related tourism are now some of the most important uses of the Forest. Established in 1972 by Congress, the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA) alone receives around 1,300,000 visits a year and offers "world class" recreation settings and opportunities.

The socio-economic area of influence for the Sawtooth National Forest includes 11 counties and 10 communities within and adjacent to the Forest. Because people use the surrounding forest and non-forested settings for social and cultural purposes as well as a variety of goods and services, National Forest management has many influences. People view scenery and recreate, which affects tourism. They utilize vegetation for cultural, social and economic reasons. Timber harvesting and grazing contribute to the economic health of the area through milling and ranching operations as well as lessening the hazardous fuel situation. People value aquatic ecosystems because they provide for a variety of beneficial uses, including clean drinking water, fishing and wildlife opportunities, and social and economic importance.

My Decision

I select Alternative 7 as the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Plan) for the Sawtooth National Forest (NF). The Revised Plan identifies Forest-wide and Management Area goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, management area prescriptions, wilderness recommendations, lands not suited for timber production, allowable sale quantity (ASQ), capability and suitability of rangelands, and monitoring and evaluation requirements.

The Revised Plan manages Forest resources to attain a set of desired conditions by emphasizing maintenance or restoration of watershed conditions, species viability, terrestrial and aquatic habitats, and functioning ecosystems. It also provides for adaptive management and monitoring. The adaptive management strategy offers an avenue to describe and evaluate the consequences of changing

conditions and knowledge. Monitoring and additional analysis will be used to shape future management actions within the framework of the Revised Plan and reshape any direction that is not effective in furthering the goals of the Revised Plan. Some key elements of my decision are:

Soil, Water, Riparian and Aquatic Resources

The Revised Plan incorporates a long-term Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) that will further the conservation and recovery of listed fish species, as well as the restoration and maintenance of beneficial uses related to water quality and long-term soil productivity. Restoration activities are focused within priority watersheds over this planning period (i.e. 10-15 years) that have been identified as providing the greatest opportunity for progression toward desired watershed conditions within individual subbasins. To provide the necessary management flexibility to accomplish restoration goals, direction resulting from this ACS recognizes that short-term effects to aquatic species and habitat may be needed to further long-term watershed restoration and species recovery goals.

Vegetation and Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat Management

Desired conditions are established for forested and non-forested vegetation components based on an understanding of their historical ranges of variability. The revised plan includes management direction designed to move toward desired conditions.

This decision establishes direction emphasizing important habitat components found within large tree forested structures specific to our local historical conditions. The “old forest” structure is a subset of the total large tree component.

The Revised Plan provides direction for a strongly integrated noxious weed management program across the Forest in cooperation with other federal, state, and local agencies.

Management Indicator Species and Species Viability

The Revised Plan selects sage grouse, pileated woodpecker, and bull trout as management indicator species (MIS). The monitoring and evaluation elements in the Revised Plan include provisions for tracking MIS population trends important to understanding effects of management activities.

Reducing Wildland Fire Risks

The Revised Plan provides direction that complements and supports the goals contained in “*A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment: A 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy*”. Revised Plan direction:

- Supports fire prevention and suppression,
- Provides direction to reduce hazardous fuels, emphasizing actions in wildland urban interface areas and National Fire Plan (NFP) Condition Classes 2 and 3,
- Provides direction to restore fire adapted ecosystems, and
- Promotes Community assistance and collaboration among governments and broadly represented stakeholders.

Recreation

A mix of recreational opportunities addresses growing demands. Emphasis is placed on the management of existing facilities. Management of dispersed recreation focuses on heavily utilized corridors to balance demands for use while minimizing unacceptable impacts to other resources.

The Revised Plan provides an increased emphasis on user education and working to bring conflicting user groups together to resolve recreation use conflicts and minimize resource impacts.

The Revised Plan commits to updating the Forest Travel Plans.

Recommended Wilderness/Roadless

All or portions of three Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) totaling 264,000 acres are recommended as wilderness: Hanson Lakes – 18,600 acres; Boulder/White Clouds – 184,400 acres; and Pioneer Mountains – 61,000. Existing mechanized uses are allowed to continue within these areas, pending Congressional action on the recommendations.

Approximately 58 percent of the National Forest System lands within the administrative boundary of the Forest fall within IRAs. Of the total 1,225,000 IRA acres on the Sawtooth NF, the Revised Plan:

- Prohibits mechanical vegetation treatments, salvage and road construction or reconstruction on approximately 22 percent of the acres. These acres include those recommended for wilderness discussed above.
- Maintains unroaded character but would allow for restoration treatments and salvage harvest on approximately 48 percent of the total acres.
- Allows road construction and reconstruction under limited circumstances and restoration activities including mechanical treatments, as well as salvage, on approximately 20% of the acres.
- Allows mechanical treatments and road construction and reconstruction on approximately 10% of the acres, the majority of which are within non-forested vegetation types.

As described later in this decision, regardless of the prescriptions and activities allowed in the Revised Plan, all IRAs will be managed consistent with the national direction for management of IRAs. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) if in effect would supercede direction for IRAs in this Revised Plan. Those areas in the Revised Plan that are identified as available for treatment could not be treated unless they meet the exceptions in the RACR.

Segments of 32 rivers, or an estimated 401 miles, are identified as eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System.

Tribal Rights and Interests

Management direction is established that emphasizes the importance of Tribal Rights and Interests, and the importance of tribal consultation during implementation of this Revised Plan.

Wood Products

An estimated 141,500 acres of suited timberlands are identified, and the Revised Plan sets an objective to make available 60 MMBF of timber for the first decade to contribute to the ASQ.

Revised Plan direction for 624,000 acres would allow vegetation treatments that may produce commercial wood products. Wood products removed from these acres could contribute an estimated 6.9 MMBF, which when added to the Forest Plan objective of 6.0 MMBF, would produce an annual Total Sale Program Quantity (TSPQ) of 12.9 MMBF over the first decade.

Livestock Grazing

An estimated 535,000 acres are identified as capable rangelands, and 464,000 acres are identified as suitable rangelands. Suitability determinations include closure of small portions of two Management Areas to address livestock/recreation conflicts, closure of a portion of one allotment to address noxious weed concerns, and closure of one allotment currently not grazed to address the risk of disease transmission to big horn sheep.

Decision Authority

I have been delegated the authority to make this decision by the Secretary of Agriculture and Chief of the Forest Service (36 CFR 219.10 (c)).

Why Alternative 7?

I selected Alternative 7 because in my judgment it provides the best mix of benefits to address the Needs for Change from the 1987 Plan identified in the Preliminary Analysis of the Management Situation (USDA Forest Service 1997), and the planning issues raised by the public. Because views on many issues vary, I realize that none of the alternatives will satisfy everyone. However, I feel that Alternative 7 strikes the best opportunity to maintain and restore ecological conditions, while providing for a broad spectrum of recreational opportunities and a realistic level of commodity production.

The management direction, emphasis, and monitoring plan in the Revised Plan are designed to:

- Replace interim direction (Pacfish/Infish and listed fish species 1995/1998 Biological Opinions) with an ecosystem-based, long-term Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS).
- Maintain or restore long-term ecosystem health and integrity.
- Contribute to the economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities.
- Provide sustainable and predictable levels of products and services from the Forest.
- Emphasize adaptive management over the long term.
- Provide consistent direction at the Forest level that will assist managers in making project decisions at a local level in the context of broader ecological considerations.

Soil, Water, Riparian and Aquatic Resources

Pacfish/Infish and associated 1998 Biological Opinions for bull trout, salmon and steelhead provided an interim strategy that included a suite of management direction that avoided or minimized adverse effects to Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed fish species and their habitats. However, as stated by NOAA Fisheries in their 1998 Biological Opinion “Indefinite extension of Pacfish, delays the recovery of salmon and steelhead, and increases the risk that key population segments will be irretrievably lost. Pacfish maintains a fragmented network of habitats and degraded habitat conditions where they presently exist...” In other words, these interim strategies were never designed to make measurable progress in the restoration of degraded conditions, but simply to “hold the line” in the short term while the agency developed a long-term, comprehensive ACS.

As a result of over 70 formal and informal consultation meetings with National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), as well as additional meetings with EPA, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), local tribes, and research, a comprehensive long-term ACS was developed. The direction in the ACS allows the necessary

management flexibility to accomplish long-term watershed restoration while at the same time balancing the short-term needs for recovery of listed aquatic species. This balance is essential to achieving desired conditions for soil, water, riparian, and aquatic resources over time.

Vegetation and Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat Management

Vegetation in many areas is currently functioning at risk and outside its historical range of variability (HRV). Vegetation management activities under Alternative 7 are designed to move vegetative species composition, size class, and canopy closure toward desired conditions that fall within the historical range of variability. The latest scientific evidence indicates that ecosystems operating within their historic range are more likely to be resilient and resistant to disturbances such as insects, disease, and fire. In turn, the various components and processes that interact with vegetation operating within HRV will more likely be sustained and function as they did historically.

The integrated noxious weed management program provided by Alternative 7 greatly expands management direction for non-native plants. Noxious weed populations will be monitored to plan annual and long-term treatment strategies. Integrated weed management emphasizes the prevention and eradication of new infestations.

Alternative 7 better reflects current scientific knowledge related to old growth habitat management for the local area. This direction, which addresses the important habitat components of large tree structures, including snags and down woody material, assures meeting the needs of species that are related to these components.

Management Indicator Species and Species Viability

Alternative 7 identifies MIS species that are non-migratory, have population trend or research data available, are sensitive to habitat changes, are widespread across the Forest, and have habitats that have been changed significantly from historic conditions. Through monitoring, these species will allow relationships to be developed for effects of management activities on population trends and habitat changes. Species selected meet the requirements set forth in 36 CFR 219.19, and population trends and related habitat changes will assist in identifying the effects of management activities to the species they represent. Appendix F of the FEIS provides a detailed discussion for selection of MIS.

Reducing Wildland Fire Risks

Alternative 7 achieves the goals and objectives of the National Fire Plan (NFP) and Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI) by focusing fuel reduction activities in the wildland-urban interface, as well as on restoration and maintenance of forested vegetation types. Opportunities are also provided for restoration treatments within 70 percent of IRAs using a combination of mechanical and fire treatments to reduce hazardous fuels.

Under Alternative 7, the objective is to schedule and complete at least 40,000 acres of fuels management through prescribed fire and mechanical treatments in the next decade, focusing on wildland/urban interface areas and NFP Condition Class 2 and 3 areas.

Recreation

Alternative 7 provides a mix of recreational access and settings, from paved roads to backcountry foot travel. Emphasizing management of existing facilities ensures they are maintained in a manner that meets user expectations before new facilities are developed.

Alternative 7 maintains existing motorized recreation opportunities until travel management decisions can address local issues and needs concerning use.

Management direction for user education and collaboration recognizes the need for users to have a clear awareness of the potential impacts of their actions on natural resources as well as on the experiences of other users.

Recommended Wilderness/Roadless

Local government and members of the public expressed strong opinions about the management of IRAs and wilderness recommendations, from opposition to any wilderness recommendations to desires for very extensive protection of all IRAs. The alternatives analyzed in the FEIS reflect the full range of opinions expressed. Similar to the 1987 Forest Plan, Alternative 7 recommends three areas totaling 264,000 acres for wilderness designation. These areas exhibit social and resource values associated with wilderness and contribute to the overall network of wildernesses within the Region and nationally.

Pending Congressional action on this recommendation, Alternative 7 allows current mechanized uses to continue in all recommended wildernesses provided that the wilderness characteristics of these areas are not measurably impacted. Allowing this current use to continue will not prevent consideration of these areas for future wilderness designation.

Nearly 58 percent (1,225,000 acres) of Sawtooth NF acres are within Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs). Alternative 7 allows management opportunities to address vegetative or aquatic restoration needs, including hazardous fuels reduction, while maintaining the unroaded character of 70 percent of the IRAs. The remaining 30 percent within IRAs allow management activities for the purpose of reducing wildland fire risk and other resource restoration objectives, which may need new road construction or reconstruction to support these activities. All IRAs are managed consistent with the most current national direction for management of IRAs.

The estimated 401 miles of rivers identified as eligible segments under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act meet the minimum requirements for addition to the national system. These rivers are free flowing and exhibit one or more “outstandingly remarkable” scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values. Under the proposed classifications for these rivers, current and future management opportunities may still occur where mitigation measures can be applied that protect their outstandingly remarkable values.

Tribal Rights and Interests

Alternative 7 facilitates the exercise of tribal rights important to meeting federal trust responsibilities. This direction will enhance relationships with American Indian Tribes important to promoting the agency’s understanding of tribal cultural resources, values, needs, interests and expectations. Revised Plan direction also emphasizes the importance of promoting cooperative activities with Tribes where there are shared management goals.

Wood Products

Alternative 7 generates commercial wood products as a result of management actions implemented to achieve desired vegetative conditions. Commercial wood products support local, regional and national interests.

Livestock Grazing

Alternative 7 has specific riparian management standards for allotment management planning to better address long-term recovery goals for fish species listed under the ESA. Rangeland suitability was re-evaluated across the Forest, and grazing levels are anticipated to remain close to current levels. Grazing practices on the Forest are maintained similar to current expectations.

Public Involvement and Alternatives Considered

Government and Public Involvement

Tribal Trust Responsibilities

No Native American Indian reservations are located within the Forest or the Forest's socio-economic area of influence. However, the ancestors of the modern day Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes were present in this area long before the Forest was established. Many of the treaties and executive orders signed by the United States government in the mid-1800s reserved homelands for the Tribes. Additionally, treaties with the Nez Perce and Shoshone-Bannock reserved certain rights outside of established reservations, including fishing, hunting, gathering, and grazing.

The Sawtooth NF Forest Supervisor and I have consulted with the Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes regarding development of the Revised Plan (FEIS, Appendix A). In addition, revised management direction under the Revised Plan (Forest Plan, Chapter III) will ensure that appropriate consultation during project-level planning will occur, and that tribal rights and interests will be considered and addressed in Forest management activities.

How was the public involved in developing this Plan?

In November 10, 1997, the Forest released a report called *Preliminary Analysis of the Management Situation Summary, Southwest Idaho Ecogroup: Boise National Forest, Payette National Forest, Sawtooth National Forest* for public review. This report, also known as the "Pre-AMS," included information on current resource conditions and uses of the Forest, and a synopsis of what management direction in the 1987 *Sawtooth National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* needed to change. Public comment was invited on the preliminary findings contained in the Pre-AMS.

Over 850 copies of the Pre-AMS were sent to individuals on the Forest Planning mailing list. Open houses were held in November 1997 in Payette, Hailey, McCall, and Twin Falls to explain the revision process and the purpose of the Pre-AMS.

On April 24, 1998, a Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the *Federal Register* announcing that the Forest Service planned to prepare an environmental impact statement in conjunction with the revision and significant amendment of its Land and Resource Management Plans for the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup. The public was provided a 60-day comment period to provide feedback on how they would like to see the Forests managed. Comments were due on June 25, 1998.

During the week of May 4, 1998, a NOI summary and listing of public workshop dates and locations were sent to the over 850 people on the Forest Planning mailing list. In addition, press releases were sent to newspapers, radio and television stations located within the southwest Idaho area. An

advertisement was also placed in the *Idaho Statesman* newspaper in Boise to inform people of the upcoming meetings. From May 26 to June 18, 1998, 257 people attended the public workshops held in 15 southwest Idaho communities. At these workshops, attendees received an overview of the planning process, followed by an opportunity to review the Proposed Action one-on-one with the area District Ranger or Revision Team representative. Individuals who attended the public workshops were added to the Forest Planning mailing list, if they were not already included, to receive future correspondences. In addition, the Revision Team made themselves available, on request, to present the proposed action and answer questions for community organizations and special interest groups. A listing of interested agencies, organization and individuals is found in Appendix A to the FEIS.

On June 29, a 60-day extension was granted, extending the comment deadline to August 25, 1998.

Between the release of the Pre-AMS and the Draft EIS, numerous meetings were held with various groups, organizations, agencies, counties and Congressional representatives. The intent of these meetings was to inform these interested parties of the revision process status, and to verify that their comments, concerns, and issues had been correctly incorporated and understood. The Responsible Official reviewed and approved a list of significant issues developed from these comments.

The Draft EIS and Plan were released on November 13, 2000. The Notice of Availability announcing the beginning of the 120-day public comment period was published in the *Federal Register* on November 24, 2000. On March 14, 2001, the comment period was extended an additional 90 days, to June 15, 2001, in response to a request from several organizations. Ten public information and workshop sessions on the DEIS and Draft Plans were held throughout southern Idaho in January 2001. Six formal hearings were held to take public comment on the documents. The Ecogroup received 3,605 responses, including the transcripts from the hearings, on the draft documents. The responses were analyzed using a content analysis process. No new issues were identified beyond those identified in the DEIS; however additional information and concerns related to the existing issues were received, and they were incorporated into the issue descriptions and indicators. In response to comments received on the draft documents, Alternative 7 was developed.

Planning Issues

As a result of the public participation process, review by other Federal, State and local government agencies, Tribes, and internal reviews, 28 significant issues were identified. All issues are described in detail in Chapters 1 and 3 of the FEIS. These issues were reviewed to determine which issues would: (1) drive alternative development; (2) influence Forest Plan direction, or (3) be used to track potential effects from the alternatives in Chapter 3 of the EIS. Of the 28 issues identified, 12 issues directly contributed to development of alternatives. These 12 “planning” issues are stated below. The 16 issues not used to formulate alternatives were used in development of mitigation measures, incorporated into management direction (goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines) or management prescriptions, or used to analyze effects. How the Revised Plan addresses the planning issues is presented later in this document.

SOIL, WATER, RIPARIAN, AND AQUATIC RESOURCES

Forest Plan management strategies may have potential effects on soil productivity, accelerated soil erosion and sedimentation, water quality, riparian function, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) water bodies, and listed Section 303(d) Water Quality Limited (WQL) water bodies. **(Issue #3)**

Forest Plan management strategies may have potential effects on aquatic habitat and species, including species that are listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Region 4 sensitive species, species at risk, and Forest Management Indicator Species. **(Issue #4)**

TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE HABITAT AND SPECIES

Forest Plan management strategies may affect habitat for terrestrial wildlife species, including species that are listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act, Region 4 sensitive species, species of special interest, species at risk, and Forest Management Indicator Species. **(Issue #1)**

Forest Plan management strategies may affect the risk of disruption, vulnerability, and disease to terrestrial wildlife species. **(Issue #2)**

VEGETATION DIVERSITY

Forest Plan management strategies may affect vegetative biodiversity by changing size class, species composition, density, structure, snags, and coarse woody debris.

VEGETATION HAZARD

Forest Plan management strategies may affect the amount of vegetation at risk to uncharacteristic wildfire and epidemic insect disturbances.

FIRE MANAGEMENT

Forest Plan management strategies may affect the restoration and maintenance of the ecological role of fire in ecosystems. **(Issue #1)**

Forest Plan management strategies may affect the amount of vegetation at risk to wildfire, and at what rate hazardous conditions are reduced in areas where there are threats to life and private property (wildland-urban interface). **(Issue #2)**

INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS

Forest Plan management strategies may affect the capability for development or wilderness potential of existing Inventoried Roadless Areas. **(Issue #1)**

Forest Plan management strategies for existing Inventoried Roadless Areas may affect the capability to treat forest health problems. **(Issue #2)**

Management strategies for recommended wilderness may affect recreation opportunities and experiences within recommended wilderness areas as well as the potential for wilderness designation of those areas. **(Issue #4)**

Forest Plan management strategies may have social and economic effects on local counties and communities. **(Issue #1)**

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Alternative Development

The range of alternatives considered in the FEIS were generated from the following sources:

Alternative 1B is the No Action Alternative required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to establish a baseline for evaluating and comparing effects of the action alternatives.

Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, was developed from needs for change identified in the Pre-AMS and comments on the Pre-AMS.

Alternatives 3, 4, 5, and 6 were developed for the DEIS to address unresolved issues related to the Proposed Action identified in the public scoping process.

Alternative 7 was developed between the DEIS and FEIS in response to comments on the DEIS.

All the action alternatives were designed to address the purpose and need to various degrees, and to address one or more of the significant issues identified above.

Alternatives Not Considered in Detail

Although they contributed to the range of alternatives considered, ten alternatives were eliminated from detailed study. The ten alternatives considered but eliminated from further study are listed below. A more detailed description of these alternatives and their reasons for elimination can be found in the FEIS, Chapter 2, Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study.

- The Original Proposed Action
- No Action, Without Direction from Biological Opinions (Alternative 1A). Revision of the Forest Plan began before completion of the 1998 Biological Opinions for Bull Trout and Salmon and Steelhead. This alternative was the original No Action alternative, later replaced with the 1987 Forest Plan as amended by Pacfish/Infish and terms and conditions in the 1998 Biological Opinions.
- Refinement in Size of Unroaded Areas (Alternative 6, First Draft)
- No New Roads, No Timber Harvest
- No Management Prescription Categories
- Travel Management
- Recommend All Inventoried Roadless Areas for Wilderness
- Allow Timber Harvest Within All Inventoried Roadless Areas
- No Livestock Grazing or Reduced Livestock Grazing

- Maximize Recreation
-

Alternatives Considered in Detail

ALTERNATIVE 1B

Alternative 1B is the “No Action” alternative, continuing current management of the Forests. This alternative incorporates amended Forest Plan direction from Pacfish/Infish and the terms and conditions from the 1998 Biological Opinions for chinook and sockeye salmon, steelhead, and bull trout. Management activities are at relatively low levels in watersheds with listed fish species, and activities are primarily related to maintaining quality habitat where it currently exists and reducing risks to habitat and species over the short term. Watershed restoration activities can occur in areas with degraded habitat, but vegetation and other restoration activities may be limited due to potential short-term effects to watershed resources. In areas outside of watersheds with listed fish species, forested vegetation is managed for improved growth and yield on suited timberlands, and suitable rangelands are managed primarily for livestock forage. Management activities are at moderate to high levels, and are designed to move forested vegetation towards even distributions of size classes on the landscape and reduce long-term risks of tree mortality from insects and disease.

ALTERNATIVE 2 – PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative 2, the Proposed Action, was designed to address need for change topics that were identified in the 1997 Pre-AMS that initiated Forest Plan revision, and is a significant departure in management from the No Action Alternative (1B). Examples of need for change topics addressed are included below. For a full description of the need for change topics and how Alternative 2 addresses these topics, refer to Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

Biodiversity – The Proposed Action adopted an ecosystem management approach using both coarse filter and fine filter strategies to address biodiversity. At the coarse-filter scale, a wider variety of management prescriptions were used to broaden the scope of management emphasis across the planning unit. At the fine-filter scale, management direction and watershed condition indicators were developed to help maintain or restore specific ecosystem components—such as large trees, snags, and coarse woody debris—and specific habitat components for species of concern.

Fire and Smoke Management - The Proposed Action retains and expands upon direction in the 1990 plan for suppression and air quality requirements, as well as adds direction for restoring and maintaining the role of fire as an ecological process where desirable. Additionally, the Proposed Action incorporates recent national efforts (the National Fire Plan and Cohesive Strategy) for reducing fire hazard across the landscapes and provides direction to focus fuel reduction activities around specific communities and within wildland-urban interface areas.

Terrestrial Habitats - Forest-wide wildlife management direction and desired vegetation conditions were designed to provide well-distributed habitats suitable for native and desired non-native species found on the three Forests. Additional direction was provided for species of concern, in response to input from USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, American Indian Tribes, and other interested organizations.

Non-native Plants – Direction was developed at both the Forest-wide and Management Area scales to create an Integrated Weed Management plans that emphasizes the prevention and eradication of new infestations.

Rangeland Resources – This alternative improves upon the original Forest Plan by adding direction and emphasis to maintain or restore non-forested vegetation that provides forage for livestock, and by adding direction that reduces impacts from grazing on other resources.

Riparian and Aquatic - Forest-wide and Management Area direction was revised to incorporate a long-term Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) for restoration and maintenance of soil, water, riparian, and aquatic resources. New management prescriptions (3.1, 3.2) were developed and used to emphasize restoration and maintenance of aquatic habitat and watershed conditions in priority areas.

Management Emphasis Areas – Direction is provided to manage existing Wilderness Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Research Natural Areas, and National Recreation Areas to protect the values for which they were established. Recommended wilderness is carried forward from the 1987 Forest Plan.

In the 1990 Forest Plan, Inventoried Roadless Areas were generally assigned management prescriptions that either allowed vegetation management and road construction to occur, or restricted both of these activities. Under the proposed action a wider variety of prescriptions were developed that provided varying degrees of protection of the undeveloped and unroaded character of IRAs.

ALTERNATIVE 3—DEIS PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative 3 was identified as the preferred alternative in the DEIS and was developed to maximize restoration opportunities across the Forest. Alternative 3 uses the same ecosystem management principles as the Proposed Action, but provides more emphasis for watershed and vegetation restoration to achieve or approach the Historical Range of Variability for biophysical resources. Management emphasis is on restoring resources with low or decreasing resiliency and integrity, and maintaining resources that are currently functioning properly. A number of key issues were considered in development of this alternative, including the need to address the risks of uncharacteristic lethal wildfire, both within and outside of IRAs, and the associated effects on soil-hydrologic function, listed species habitat, and water quality. Other issues concerned the need to actively restore degraded soil, water, and riparian conditions, aquatic and terrestrial species habitats, and vegetative diversity across the landscape. This alternative emphasizes active restoration and accepts some short-term risk for long-term gain for terrestrial and aquatic habitats, and watershed resources. Commodity outputs are a result of treatments designed to achieve desired vegetation conditions.

ALTERNATIVE 4

Alternative 4 addresses the concern that natural processes should be allowed to play a more dominant role in Forest management. This alternative responds to the desires of people who would like to see more wilderness and/or primitive forest settings, and reduced emphasis on active management practices such as timber harvest. The overall management emphasis in Alternative 4 is to maintain conditions as they are in the short term, allowing ecological processes to determine conditions over the long term. Under this alternative, active management opportunities are focused more on fire use in vegetation as compared to other alternatives, with biophysical conditions primarily influenced by ecological processes. Short-term risks to species viability and ecological integrity are reduced as human-caused disturbance over the planning period is minimized. Mechanical vegetation management

activities are at very low levels throughout the Forest, and are primarily related to objectives other than growth and yield. Restoration opportunities exist, however the primary emphasis for restoration is through passive management and fire use. The full range of recreation experiences is available, but the emphasis is on primitive or semi-primitive settings and opportunities. Most acres within IRAs are recommended for wilderness designation, and mechanized uses are prohibited in Recommended Wilderness areas. This alternative has the highest fire use and treats more acres with fire and mechanical than does Alternative 1B.

ALTERNATIVE 5

Alternative 5 emphasizes production of goods and services within sustainable limits of the ecosystem. Forested vegetation is managed primarily for growth and yield on suited timberlands; suitable rangelands are managed primarily for livestock forage. Alternative 5 addresses the concern that the Forest can and should be used to directly benefit economies, livelihoods, and traditions of families and local communities through a high level of predictable sustained outputs. The high level of management activities produce short-term risks to the environment, but are designed to reduce the long-term risks of tree mortality and other negative impacts from uncharacteristic disturbance events. Opportunities for active restoration exist, but the primary emphasis is providing timber and range outputs through active management on suited and suitable lands. The full range of recreation experiences is available, but the emphasis is on roaded modified or roaded natural settings and opportunities.

ALTERNATIVE 6

Alternative 6 is designed to reduce the risks of human-caused impacts to the ecological values of IRAs and unroaded areas (1,000 to 5,000 acres) by minimizing management activities and eliminating incompatible uses within those areas. This alternative was developed as a conservative approach to meeting the intent of the President's Roadless Initiative in 1999, and to addressing concerns that the Forest should be managed in accordance with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (2001).

Outside IRAs and unroaded areas, Alternative 6 emphasizes restoration of degraded habitats through active human management, adopting a long-term strategy for restoration and maintenance of soil, water, riparian, and aquatic resources. Resources with low resiliency and integrity are restored within a range of desired conditions to reduce risks associated with disturbance events. Resources resilient or resistant to disturbance receive custodial maintenance or no treatment over the short term. Commodity outputs are primarily a result of restoration activities designed to meet desired conditions outside of IRAs and unroaded areas. The full range of recreation experiences is available, but the emphasis is on primitive or semi-primitive settings and opportunities within roadless, wilderness, and recommended wilderness areas. Mechanized uses are prohibited in recommended wilderness areas.

ALTERNATIVE 7—SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Alternative 7 mixes components of Alternatives 3, 5, and 6. Alternative 7 emphasizes restoration of ecosystems for species conservation and recovery, while providing for economic opportunities in support of social and cultural values. It maintains a large portion of the unroaded character of IRAs. An estimated 82 percent of the total IRAs are in MPCs that do not allow road construction or reconstruction, but do allow for varying types and intensities of restoration activities that will move aquatic resources, riparian areas, terrestrial habitat, and vegetation toward their desired conditions. It emphasizes providing for sustainable levels of goods and services and emphasizes wood product yields on the roaded portions of the Forest.

Introduction

The analysis of alternatives and public comment received on the DEIS and Proposed Revised Plan documented in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Forest Plan for the Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests* (FEIS) serves as the foundation for my decision for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Sawtooth NF. My decision incorporates by reference the analysis of effects and management direction disclosed in the FEIS and Revised Plan and the planning record in its entirety. All references and citations used in this ROD are fully described in the FEIS and Revised Plan.

My decision applies only to National Forest System lands in the Sawtooth NF. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although the effects of my decision on those lands are considered.

Forest Plan Decisions

A Forest Plan establishes the framework for future decision-making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the goals and objectives of the Forest. A Forest Plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on internal operations. The Revised Plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities. I am making the following decisions in the Revised Plan:

- Goals and objectives that lead to ecological sustainability, contribute to economic and social sustainability, and provide for multiple uses.
- Forest-wide requirements (standards and guidelines) that apply to future management activities.
- Management direction through the use of management prescription category designation.
- Non-wilderness allocations or Wilderness recommendations for IRAs.
- Identification of lands not suited for timber production and establishment of the allowable timber sale quantity for the planning period, and identification of suitability and capability of lands for producing forage.
- Monitoring and evaluation requirements.

FOREST-WIDE MULTIPLE-USE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES (36 CFR 219.11(b))

A goal is a concise statement that describes a desired condition to be achieved sometime in the future. It is normally expressed in broad, general terms and may not have a specific date for accomplishment. An objective is a clear and quantifiable statement of planned results to be achieved within a stated time period. An objective must be achievable, measurable, and have a stated time period for completion.

The Revised Plan includes a set of Forest multiple-use goals and objectives that include a description of the desired condition of the Sawtooth NF and an identification of the quantities of goods and services that we expect to produce or provide during the planning period. Goals and objectives are described in Chapter III of the Revised Plan.

FOREST-WIDE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (36 CFR 219.13 TO 219.27)

Standards are used to promote the achievement of the goals and objectives; and to assure compliance with laws, regulations, Executive Orders or policy. Standards are binding limitations on management activities that are within the authority of the Forest Service to enforce. A standard can also be expressed as a constraint on management activities or practices. The Revised Plan contains Forest-wide, Management Area, and Management Prescription Category standards. These are displayed in Chapter III of the Revised Plan.

Guidelines are used in the same way as standards but tend to be operationally flexible to respond to variations, such as changing site conditions or changed management circumstances. Guidelines are a preferred or advisable course of action and they are expected to be carried out, unless site-specific analysis identifies a better approach. The Revised Plan contains Forest-wide, Management Area, and Management Prescription Category guidelines in Chapter III.

MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION DIRECTION (36 CFR 219.11(c))

Management prescriptions, an integrated set of management practices, have been applied to specific areas of land to attain goals and objectives on the Sawtooth NF. Management prescriptions in the Revised Plan identify the emphasis and focus of management activities in a specific area; however, **emphasis**, as used in this context, is defined as a focus or a highlight and does not necessarily mean exclusive use. The specific direction stated in a management prescription determines what uses are allowed and to what extent the uses are permitted. Table 1 below lists the Management Prescriptions established by the Revised Plan for the Sawtooth NF and the acreage to which each applies. The direction for each of these management prescriptions is detailed in Chapter III of the Revised Plan

Table 1. Management Prescriptions

Prescription Category	Prescription Name (Number)	Acres*
Wilderness /Backcountry	1.1 - Designated Wilderness	218,000
	1.2 – Recommended Wilderness	264,000
Special Management Area	2.2 - Research Natural Areas	3,000
Protection, Maintenance or Restoration	3.1 – Passive Restoration and Maintenance of Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologic Resources	119,000
	3.2 – Active Restoration and Maintenance of Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologic Resources	367,000
Developed/Dispersed Recreation	4.1c – Undeveloped Recreation: Maintain Unroaded Character with Allowance for Restoration Activities	483,000
	4.2 – Roaded Recreation Emphasis	163,000
	4.3 – Concentrated Recreation	2,000
Forested Vegetation Management	5.1 – Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested Landscapes	79,000
Rangeland Vegetation Management	6.1 – Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Shrubland and Grassland Landscapes	415,000
Totals		2,113,000

*Acres are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Inventoried Roadless Area Evaluation

The Interdisciplinary Team examined 25 IRAs for wilderness characteristics (FEIS, Appendix C-1).). In addition, Appendix H to the FEIS includes an evaluation of roadless area characteristics as defined by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (January 12, 2001). The Revised Plan maintains roadless characteristics on 22% of the total 1,225,000 acres of IRA; and maintains unroaded character on 48% of the total acres of IRA while providing opportunities for restoration treatments, salvage harvest and trail construction but not road construction or reconstruction. It allows for restoration treatments, salvage harvest and limited road construction/reconstruction on 20% of the total IRAs, and allows for full development on approximately 10% of the IRAs, the majority of which are within non-forested vegetation types.

Recommended Wilderness

I am recommending 264,000 acres for designation in the National Wilderness Preservation System in the following three areas:

- Hanson Lakes – 18,600 acres;
- Boulder/White Clouds – 184,400 acres; and
- Pioneer Mountains – 61,000.

My recommendation is based on the Roadless Area evaluation summarized in Appendix C to the FEIS, and the Roadless Characteristics analysis in Appendix H to the FEIS and the following rationale:

- These are the same areas recommended in the 1987 Forest Plan. The evaluation in Appendix C demonstrated that the wilderness potential of these areas has not diminished since that time.
- All three areas rate out high for wilderness capability, are available, and manageable due to their size and high integrity.
- All three areas have many special features, including habitat for ESA listed and Region 4 sensitive species, scenic landmarks, and portions of rivers considered eligible for inclusion in WS&R.
- Hanson Lakes has relatively low or limited mineral development potential and the Boulder/White Clouds moderate to high potential for mineral development. Both areas are withdrawn from mineral entry under PL92-400. All three areas have low timber productivity.
- All three areas have elicited high public interest for wilderness designation.
- The analysis in Appendix H indicated that these three areas rated out the highest on the Forest for the quantity and quality of their roadless characteristics.

This recommendation is a preliminary administrative recommendation that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. The Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation. Therefore, this wilderness recommendation is not appealable under the agency's administrative appeal procedures.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

An eligibility inventory for wild and scenic rivers was conducted on 601 rivers. Thirty-two rivers were found to have segments determined to be free flowing and have at least one outstandingly remarkable value, and the value(s) were unique or rare within the Region of Comparison. The free flow and outstanding values of these thirty-two eligible segments will be protected until suitability studies are conducted. Table WSR-4 in Chapter 3 of the FEIS lists these river segments. Management direction applied to these segments can be found in Chapter III of the Revised Plan.

SUITABILITY DETERMINATIONS (36CFR 219.14, 219.16 AND 219.20)

Reassessment of tentatively suited timberlands was accomplished in accordance with Forest Plan regulations 36 CFR § 219.14 and Forest Service Handbook FSH 2409.13 Chapter 20. The Revised Plan identifies forested lands in potential vegetation groups 2 through 10, and in management prescription categories 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, and 6.1 as suited timberlands. Of the total forested acres, 141,500 acres were identified as suited. Another 624,000 acres allow timber harvest which may produce commercial products, but which would be incidental to other management and not counted as part of the Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ). The ASQ is 11.7 MMBF (annual average harvest over 10 years), which is harvested only from suitable timberlands. The estimated total sale program quantity (TSPQ) of 29.43 MMBF (annual average harvest) is the maximum amount of timber that is projected to come from all lands with prescriptions that allow timber harvest. The Revised Plan sets an objective of 6 MMBF (annual average harvest over 10 years) for the first decade to contribute to the ASQ and an 12.9 MMBF (annual average harvest) objective for the first decade to contribute to TSPQ

An estimated 464,038 acres are designated suitable for domestic livestock grazing (see Table RR-10 in the FEIS). Suitability determinations include closure of small portions of two Management Areas to address livestock/recreation conflicts, closure of a portion of one allotment to address noxious weed concerns, and closure of one allotment currently not grazed to address the risk of disease transmission to big horn sheep.

MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT (36CFR 219.11(D))

The monitoring and evaluation section of the Revised Plan is a key to adaptive management. It indicates whether we are achieving what we intended, or if plan amendments are needed. In this revision, I have kept Forest Plan monitoring trim, specific and feasible to focus on key items, and to recognize our workload commitments in other areas. Forest Plan monitoring is only one of the many monitoring activities we do on the Forest, and the results will be integrated with other monitoring efforts. The monitoring and evaluation section is found in Chapter IV of the Revised Plan.

Rationale for my decision

My decision to select Alternative 7 for implementation is based on three principal factors.

1. **Consistency with National Policy and direction.** Forest plan decisions must be consistent with the extensive body of law, regulation and policy established at the national level.
2. **The relationship of my decision to planning issues identified during the planning process.** Organizations, local governments, and the general public all submitted comments that required me to take a hard look at the planning issues and how they were addressed by each alternative.

In a number of cases public and agency comments helped me identify a reasonable range of alternatives and necessary management direction.

3. **Compatibility of goals of other Governments and Tribes** was another important factor that drove my decision making process. Comments received from State agencies, Indian Tribes and elected officials were considered in making my selection.

How each of these factors was considered in my decision is detailed below:

Consistency with National Policy

In making my decision I evaluated each of the alternatives for compliance with National policy and direction. In all cases, except for the No Action Alternative, all the alternatives are consistent with National policy and direction.

FOREST AND RANGELAND RENEWABLE RESOURCES PLANNING ACT (RPA)

The 1982 NFMA regulations at (36 CFR 219.12(f)(6)) require that at least one alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Resources Planning Act (RPA) Program's tentative resource objectives for each National Forest/Grassland as displayed in Regional Guides.

The Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000), in lieu of a RPA Program, was completed in accordance with Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) and the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

While Forest Plans should be consistent with the broad guidance provided in the Strategic Plan and should consider the information provided by the RPA Assessment along with other available and relevant science, neither the Strategic Plan nor the Assessment contain recommended outputs that must be incorporated in specific Forest Plans.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE RESULTS ACT (GPRA) - FOREST SERVICE STRATEGIC PLAN

The GPRA requires Federal agencies to prepare periodic strategic and annual performance plans, focusing on outcomes and results. The first Strategic Plan issued by the Forest Service in 1997 replaced the Agency's former strategic plan created under RPA. This plan was updated in 2000.

The goals and objectives in the Revised Plan are consistent with the Forest Service Strategic Plan.

Ecosystem Health - The Revised Plan addresses ecosystem health in a variety of ways. The Revised Plan uses ecosystem management as the basic framework when developing management direction. Management activities are tailored to the capabilities and sensitivities of specific landscapes across the Forest. The Revised Plan emphasizes vegetation and fuel treatments to move vegetation toward a desired condition in an environmentally sensitive way. It includes standards and guidelines to protect, improve, and/or mitigate impacts to watersheds, riparian and aquatic habitats, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitats.

Multiple Benefits to People - The Revised Plan provides sustainable levels of economic contributions to communities and continuance of a variety of uses, while providing clean water, protections for at-risk ecosystem components, proper ecosystem functioning, and a broad spectrum of recreation uses.

Scientific and Technical Assistance - The Revised Plan is based on adaptive management, using monitoring and evaluation to enhance our understanding of the resources. Monitoring and evaluation provide an avenue for incorporating new information and obtaining technical assistance on management problems. Monitoring and evaluation give us an indication of progress toward desired conditions. As scientific and technological changes take place, there may be changes to monitoring and evaluation methods that allow us to measure progress in new ways. Monitoring is a tool; desired conditions are the objective. I fully anticipate advances in technology and research findings to change our understanding of indicators monitored and methods used. (Periodic monitoring of changes in Forest-wide vegetation composition and structure or annual monitoring of forage utilization are notable examples.)

Effective Public Service - The Revised Plan was developed in response to comments from the public regarding management of the Sawtooth NF. The Revised Plan provides for human uses of the environment as well as preserving much of the inherent “wildness” of some areas on the Forest. Goals and objectives throughout the Revised Plan emphasize cooperation and coordination with other interested parties in management of the natural resources on the Forest.

HEALTHY FORESTS INITIATIVE/NATIONAL FIRE PLAN

On December 11, 2002, the President announced a series of new administrative steps referred to as the Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI) to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires and improve the health of our nation's forests.

These actions will reduce unnecessary red tape and needless delays that have too often delayed efforts to reduce the threat of devastating wildfires and insect infestations that damage both public and private lands. The new procedures will ensure that needed environmental reviews and public review processes are conducted in the most efficient and effective way possible.

The National Fire Plan (NFP) is a long-term investment that will help protect communities and natural resources, and most importantly, the lives of firefighters and the public. The NFP is a key component of the HFI. It is a long-term commitment based on cooperation and communication among Federal agencies, States, local governments, Tribes and interested publics. Federal wildland fire management agencies worked closely with the partners to prepare a 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy, completed in August 2001.

The Revised Plan provides direction to implement the NFP by applying broader uses of prescribed fire, wildland fire use, and mechanical treatments designed to reduce hazardous fuels. It is consistent with collaborative efforts of the Idaho State-wide Implementation Strategy for the NFP (2002). Treatment priorities will be coordinated with the States of Idaho and Utah.

Modeling used in support of revision analysis efforts indicates that there are currently 21,137 acres of NFP Condition Class 3 acres. Under Alternative 7, the objective is to schedule and complete at least 40,000 acres of fuels management through prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. Treatment priorities will be coordinated with the States of Idaho and Utah.

NATIONAL ENERGY POLICY (E.O. 13212)

In May 2001, Executive Order 13212 was signed to expedite the processing of energy-related projects. The National Energy Plan was developed to implement the Executive Order. Based on this Plan, the

Forest reviewed the *Western Regional Corridor Study (1992)*. In response to this study, the Revision Team worked with local utility companies to validate future power corridor needs. No additional needs for utility corridors were identified. It is my determination that the Revised Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 13212.

ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE

Management direction for IRAs was analyzed on a national scale through the Roadless Areas Conservation EIS, initiated by the Forest Service in the fall of 1999. In November 2000, the Forest Service issued the FEIS for the Roadless Area Conservation Rule in which the Preferred Alternative prohibited timber harvest and road building in IRAs.

On January 12, 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) was published in *Federal Register* (36 CFR 294). The RACR prohibited road construction and reconstruction and the cutting, sale and removal of timber, with certain exceptions, for the IRAs identified in the FEIS. However, timber harvest for stewardship reasons could be done. The RACR had an effective date of March 13, 2001. This effective date was later delayed until May 12, 2002.

Subsequently, several groups and States sued the Forest Service. The RACR remains the subject of nine lawsuits in six judicial districts and four judicial circuits. As these cases are resolved, direction for management of IRAs may change. The Sawtooth NF will follow the most current direction for management of IRAs. The RACR if in effect would supercede this Revised Plan. In that case, those areas in the Revised Plan that are identified as available for treatment could not be treated unless they meet the exceptions in the RACR.

As a part of the forest plan revision process, an individual evaluation was conducted for each IRA (FEIS Appendix C). This became the basis for applying management prescriptions to IRAs. Due to the uncertainty of the implementing the prohibitions of the RACR, a number of alternatives consistent with the RACR were considered during the plan revision process. Several alternatives were considered with other management approaches that were not consistent with the RACR. The management approach selected for the Revised Plan emphasizes conservation of most IRAs. An estimated 22 percent of IRAs have prescriptions that maintain undeveloped and unroaded values and allow no development. An estimated 48 percent of the IRAs would allow low levels of restoration activities and salvage harvest. Twenty percent of the IRAs would allow low levels of restoration activities and salvage harvest, including associated road construction/reconstruction. Approximately 10% of the IRAs, the majority of which are with non-forested vegetation types, allow for full development.

TRANSPORTATION RULE AND POLICY

On January 12, 2001, the Chief of the Forest Service signed the *Administration of the Forest Development Transportation System; Prohibitions; Use of Motor Vehicles Off Forest Service Roads* (Transportation Rule), and *Forest Service Transportation, Final Administrative Policy* (Transportation Policy). The Transportation Rule and Policy provide guidance for transportation analysis – they do not dictate or adopt land management decisions.

The Transportation Rule requires the Forest Service to identify a minimum road system, determining which roads are needed (classified) and which roads are unneeded (unclassified). Decisions are to be accomplished through area/project planning and documented through the NEPA process, including full public participation.

Beginning on January 12, 2002, the Transportation Policy requires that a roads analysis (watershed or project-area scale) be prepared before most road management decisions are made to inform those decisions to construct or reconstruct roads. This roads analysis is not a formal decision-making process. Road management decisions are made through the NEPA process with full public and tribal participation and involvement.

The Roads Analysis for the Sawtooth NF was completed in June 2003. The information in that report has informed my decision.

How the Revised Forest Plan addresses the planning issues

One of the major reasons I have selected Alternative 7 as the Revised Plan is because it responds positively and thoroughly to the planning issues. The following is my evaluation of Alternative 7's response to each of the planning issues.

SOIL, WATER, RIPARIAN, AND AQUATIC RESOURCE ISSUES

The original plans were amended by Pacfish/Infish and associated 1998 Biological Opinions for listed fish species to provide additional protection for those species and their habitats. These documents provided protection for fish in the short term, but did not provide a long-term ACS for fish populations and subpopulations, or habitat restoration. Indeed, activities designed for long-term watershed or fish habitat restoration have been at times difficult to implement under this direction due to the short-term impacts that they might produce. Forest-wide and Management Area direction incorporates soil, water, riparian, and aquatic habitat protection, while adopting a long-term Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) for restoration and maintenance of these resources.

One of the components of the ACS is the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup Matrix of Pathways and Watershed Condition Indicators (Appendix B of the Revised Plan), or the "Matrix." The Matrix and its Watershed Condition Indicators (WCI) will assist in:

- Identifying how management actions may potentially influence the condition and trend of soil, water, riparian, and aquatic resources, including native and desired non-native fish;
- Making ESA Determinations of Effects to Listed Fish Species important to assessing ESA compliance; and
- Identifying how management actions may potentially influence beneficial uses and the importance of that influence to assessing Clean Water Act compliance.

The Revised Plan provides measures that protect soil, water, riparian, and aquatic resources. Management activities will be designed to maintain or restore desired conditions. Management Areas identify priority restoration subwatersheds, and provides specific objectives for addressing restoration needs. Special management prescriptions have also been developed to emphasize management for passive (MPC 3.1) and active (MPC 3.2) restoration and maintenance of aquatic, terrestrial, and hydrologic resources. Under the Revised Plan, these occur on 486,000 acres.

The Revised Plan places a strong emphasis on protecting Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs) and high-risk landslide-prone areas by managing all such areas within suited timberland MPCs as if they were MPC 3.2; and within MPCs 2.4, 4.1c, 3.2, 4.3 as if they were MPC 3.1 (see Appendix B, Modeling Assumptions for Landslide-Prone Areas). Moderate landslide-prone areas also have increased emphasis for restoration.

TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE HABITAT AND SPECIES ISSUES

MIS in the 1987 Forest Plan were selected primarily because their habitat requirements encompassed a diverse range of conditions. Monitoring and management experience has indicated that some species may not be the best indicators for the habitats they are intended to represent because their populations are substantially affected by off-Forest activities and conditions; they are habitat generalists, they are not widespread; or their habitats have not changed significantly from historic. These criteria were considered in the selection of MIS for the Revised Plan.

Forest-wide wildlife management direction and desired vegetation conditions for the Revised Plan are designed to provide well-distributed habitats suitable for native and desired non-native species found on the Forest. Direction is provided for species of concern, in response to input from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, American Indian Tribes, and other interested organizations. MPCs 3.1, 3.2, 5.1, and 6.1 emphasizing restoration and maintenance of terrestrial habitat, watershed, and vegetation conditions are assigned to 980,000 acres on the Forest.

Goals and objectives focus on returning specific potential vegetation groups and cover types at greatest departure from historic to within HRV. Management prescriptions and Management Area objectives identify specific areas of land where emphasis will be on terrestrial or aquatic habitats, unique botanical resources, and forest or rangeland vegetation management needs. This management direction will result in the necessary diversity of forest and rangeland habitats to maintain important wildlife corridors and provide for diverse habitat structure; prevent additional road fragmentation in most of the IRAs; and allow for vegetation treatments and improved riparian area management to achieve properly functioning conditions.

The Revised Plan addresses species viability in several ways. Forest-wide management direction and prescriptions include standards and guidelines specifically designed to protect, improve, and/or mitigate impacts to watersheds, riparian and aquatic habitats, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitats. Monitoring requirements in the Revised Plan provide a process for learning how management activities may affect MIS habitats and population trends.

The Biological Assessment and Evaluation for the Revised Plan identified federally listed, candidate, proposed, and Forest Service Intermountain Region sensitive species, and determined that the Plan provides for managing fish and wildlife habitat to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species. These determinations were based on the Revised Plan's standards and guidelines, management prescriptions, and monitoring as well as on the requirement for future site-specific environmental analyses of all proposed actions under the NEPA. Species-specific direction from conservation strategies and agreements is integrated and incorporated in the Revised Plan, making it a starting point for all future project proposals.

The Revised Plan addresses habitat fragmentation and species disruption and vulnerability through management direction or emphasis that: 1) incorporates the consideration of fragmentation and disruption effects into project design and implementation, 2) recommends seasonal road closures to address big game vulnerability, (3) emphasizes decommissioning roads no longer needed, and 4) maintains the unroaded status of most roadless areas.

Alternative 7, directly addresses disease transmission from domestic sheep to bighorn sheep by removing nearly 66,000 acres from suitable rangelands that have been identified as areas where bighorn sheep are at risk for disease transmission.

VEGETATION DIVERSITY ISSUES

The Pre-AMS identified many components related to biodiversity, but the over-riding concern was that biodiversity was changing across the Forest due to past management practices. Intensive management in some areas, and fire exclusion in other areas, have had the overall effect of decreasing diversity of vegetation and habitat conditions, as well as species richness. The Revised Plan adopts an ecosystem management approach, using both coarse filter and fine filter strategies. At the coarse-filter scale, a wider variety of management prescriptions were used to broaden the scope of management emphasis across the Forest. At the fine-filter scale, management direction and matrices were developed to help maintain or restore specific ecosystem components—such as large trees, snags, and coarse woody debris—and specific habitat components for species of concern.

The development of desired conditions for vegetation components with an understanding of their historical ranges of variability (HRV) is the most significant change in management direction related to vegetation management and diversity. The Revised Plan provides management direction to restore or maintain plant community attributes (species composition, size class, canopy closure, snags, and coarse woody debris) through goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines. It is assumed that ecosystems operating within their HRV have evolved within the influences of disturbances—such as insects, disease, and fire—and are therefore more likely to be resilient and diverse because of these influences. The restoration or maintenance of desired vegetative conditions and the ecological processes that support them will provide for the overall biological diversity necessary to sustain individual species of concern and minimize risks of uncharacteristic disturbances.

The Revised Plan emphasizes active management using fire and/or mechanical treatments for achieving desired vegetation composition, structure, and function to benefit watershed, wildlife, and vegetative diversity. The Revised Plan addresses vegetation diversity and species viability requirements through expanded and specific desired conditions and direction for vegetation components. Old growth direction in the 1987 Plan has been replaced by large tree size class direction, which research indicates is more appropriate for addressing species viability in our local area.

VEGETATION HAZARD ISSUES

The Revised Plan emphasizes vegetative restoration MPCs (3.1, 3.2, 4.1c, 5.1, 6.1), and includes allowances for restoration within IRAs to address risks for uncharacteristic wildfire and epidemic insect and disease outbreaks. It is assumed that ecosystems operating within their HRV have evolved within the influences of disturbances, such as insects, disease, and fire, and are therefore more likely to be resilient and diverse because of these influences. See also Fire Management Issues below.

FIRE MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The 1987 Forest Plan focused primarily on fire suppression and meeting federal and state air quality requirements for managing smoke from prescribed burning. The Revised Plan retains and expands direction for suppression and air quality requirements, but also adds direction for restoring and maintaining the role of fire as an ecological process where desirable. The Revised Plan balances the concerns of competing interests who believe either that fire should be allowed play its natural role, or

that both mechanical and fire treatment options will be needed to effectively (in time and area) reduce fuels in a manner that is safe and minimizes impacts to air quality and other biophysical resources. Fire's role as an ecosystem process is integrated into desired conditions and goals at the Forest-wide and Management Area levels. Potential impacts from fire use have been evaluated, and fire use areas are identified in the Management Areas. Fire use is restricted in areas where it could have undesirable effects on resources or investments.

The Revised Plan incorporates recent national efforts (the National Fire Plan and Cohesive Strategy) for reducing fire hazard across landscapes and provides direction to focus fuel reduction activities around specific communities and within wildland-urban interface areas. Coordination and education efforts with adjacent landowners have also been added to Forest-wide and Management Area direction. MPC direction gives additional clarification as to how fire may be used, emphasized, or suppressed.

The majority of interface subwatersheds are assigned MPCs that allow both fire and mechanical options for fuel reduction. The assumption is the greater the percent of area in MPCs that allow both fire and mechanical treatments compared to those MPCs that allow only fire treatments; the greater the opportunity is to reduce hazardous vegetative conditions. National Fire Plan communities and wildland-urban interface areas are identified by Management Area, and objectives are provided to prioritize fuels reduction treatments in these areas.

Management area goals and objectives consider the juxtaposition of adjacent areas and, where possible, are consistent in order to reduce conflicts when wildland fires cross management area boundaries. Management area descriptions and objectives highlight fire suppression priorities in order to assist in selection of appropriate suppression strategies and tactics. In addition, the allowable range of Appropriate Management Responses is identified for each management area, considering the effects on resources and social-economic factors.

INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA ISSUES

The Revised Plan assigns MPCs (1.2, 2.2, 3.1, 4.1c) that would maintain unroaded character in about 70 percent of IRAs. These prescriptions would promote similar activities (habitat and ecological restoration, hazardous fuels reduction) as those allowed in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Although these MPCs do not remove all potential for development from vegetation treatments, they do provide a high level of protection for IRAs. The remaining 30 percent within IRAs allow management activities for the purpose of reducing wildland fire risk and other resource restoration objectives, which may need new road construction or reconstruction to support these activities.

All IRAs will be managed consistent with the most current national direction for management of IRAs. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) if in effect would supercede this Revised Plan. Those areas in the Revised Plan that are identified as available for treatment could not be treated unless they meet the exceptions in the RACR.

The Revised Plan recommends 264,000 acres within three IRAs as wilderness- Hanson Lakes – 18,600 acres; Boulder/White Clouds – 184,400 acres; and Pioneer Mountains – 61,000. These are the same areas recommended under the 1987 Plan. The Revised Plan would maintain mechanized transport uses where they currently occur to provide a variety of access options to these areas until Congress decides whether or not to designate them as wilderness. Additional travel management decisions could be made at the project level, but not until they undergo full public and tribal involvement and analysis following standard NEPA procedures.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

The Revised Plan provides for sustainable levels of economic contributions to communities and continuance of a variety of uses, while providing for restoration of ecosystem components functioning at risk, maintenance of ecosystem components in properly functioning condition, and a broad spectrum of recreation uses. Under the direction of the Revised Plan, livestock grazing on suitable rangelands will meet stated standards and provide about the same outputs as experienced over the last ten years.

Rangeland capability and suitability were reassessed for Forest Plan revision (see FEIS, Rangeland Resources section, Chapter 3). The Revised Plan adds direction and emphasis to maintain or restore non-forested vegetation that provides forage for livestock, and reduces impacts from grazing on other resources.

The Revised Plan includes an objective of 60 MMBF over the first decade to contribute to the ASQ and a 12.9 MMBF objective for the first decade to contribute to the TSPQ. Timber harvest will be used as one of several methods to achieve goals for desired vegetation conditions.

In our revision outreach efforts, we heard from a diverse set of constituents that the Sawtooth NF is very important from personal, societal and spiritual perspectives. My decision attempts to balance many uses of the Forest, some of which are in conflict, and still provide valuable personal and social benefits for most people who use or depend on the Forest. It attempts to give something to everyone, but cannot supply everything that is demanded.

Compatibility with Goals of other Governments and Tribes (36 CFR 219.7(c))

I considered comments received from public agencies, American Indian Tribes, and elected officials in my decision-making process. Based on these comments, I have made a comparison between the Revised Plan goals and the goals and concerns expressed by the following groups:

The Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes

The Forest consulted with the affected Tribes numerous times during the revision effort. In total, 18 meetings were conducted. The method and amount of consultation varied by Tribe. The method by which a consultation meeting would occur was mutually agreed to between the Forest Service and the Tribe prior to the event. Methods utilized included face-to-face settings with technical specialists and/or Forest Supervisors, conference calls, sharing of written and GIS mapping information, formal written letters between the governments, and face-to-face meetings between the Regional Forester and a Tribal Executive Committee or Tribal Business Council. Consultation continued until the individual Tribe stated they had no more issues or concerns to discuss.

Tribes were encouraged to supply written narrative for tribal sections in the FEIS, the Revised Plan and the associated appendices. Issues and concerns identified were addressed through development of the analysis framework in the FEIS and the direction found in the Revised Plan.

County and State Officials

The Forest provided periodic status and project updates to County and State agencies and officials. County governments expressed concern over the status of roadless area management and, that the forest be actively managed to address forest health concerns. Consultation with State agencies indicates that there are no major conflicts between the direction in the Revised Plan and the goals and objectives of these government entities. The Sawtooth NF made various efforts during the revision process to understand and consider the policies and perspectives of other agencies and governments. Many county commissioners were interviewed regarding their particular concerns with the existing plan, and alternatives were developed with these considerations in mind. State agencies involved in the revision effort provided input that was considered in development of management direction.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA Fisheries

The Revision Team wildlife biologist, fishery biologist, and other staff members have spent considerable time interacting with their State and Federal agency counterparts to identify concerns that needed to be addressed in management direction.

More than 70 formal and informal consultation meetings were held with NOAA Fisheries and USDI Fish and Wildlife Service. Aquatic resource concerns were addressed through development of the long-term Aquatic Conservation Strategy that not only provided for protection to ESA listed aquatic species, but also for restoration of degraded habitats important to the recovery of those species. Management direction for ESA listed terrestrial wildlife and plant species was similarly developed.

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) and Environmental Protection Agency

The Revision Team planners and resource specialists spent considerable time interacting with IDEQ and EPA to identify environmental quality concerns to be addressed in management direction. Though many areas were discussed, discussions focused on air and water quality concerns. Concerns were addressed through development of the long-term ACS that, in part, addresses maintenance and restoration of beneficial uses associated with water quality. In addition, direction was specifically developed to address air quality concerns in airsheds that may be measurably affected by plan implementation.

Findings Related to other Laws and Authorities

Findings Required by Law

How does the Revised Forest Plan meet other laws and authorities?

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA)

Consideration of Long-term and Short-term Effects

The Revised Plan will govern management of the Sawtooth NF resources for the next 10 to 15 years. The FEIS discloses the analysis of effects for a range of alternatives including No Action. It considered effects to the significant issues and other resources for this time frame and projected over the next 50 to 150 years, depending on resource area. In the Revised Plan, the Desired Condition (DC) for vegetative components is largely based on their HRV. In areas where these components are well outside their HRV, achieving DC during the life of the Revised Plan would require a dramatic increase in vegetation treatments such as mechanical disturbance or prescribed fire. This increase is not achievable given current and anticipated staffing, budgets, and planning requirements. Nor would that level of disturbance be desirable from an environmental effects standpoint. All resources such as fisheries, wildlife, and soils are dependent on healthy and sustainable vegetative communities. Wide-scale disturbance throughout the Forest to move rapidly toward HRV would have significant negative effects on those other resources in the short term. Over the long term, these same resources would benefit from more sustainable and productive ecosystems.

Land management actions permitted by the Revised Plan balance short-term effects and current program abilities with the long-term need for sustainability of vegetative communities of the Forest. The objectives in the Revised Plan reflect an achievable number of acres treated. These treatments will focus on key areas and ecosystems. For example:

- Emphasis is placed on restoration and regeneration of forested vegetative communities identified as being at greatest departure from historic conditions on the Forest.
- Hazardous fuel reduction is a management emphasis in the wildland-urban interface where communities are at risk from wildfire.

Human uses of the Sawtooth NF natural resources are also a major consideration in the Revised Plan. The Revised Plan balances demands for a variety of recreation opportunities and the overall diversity of recreation settings is maintained. Motorized and mechanized use opportunities within IRAs and across the Forest as a whole would be maintained as they exist currently. In an evaluation of roadless area wilderness potential (FEIS, Appendix C), I have determined that many of these areas should be managed to maintain their roadless character and values, but they should allow for treatments to reduce risks from uncharacteristic wildfire or insect and disease epidemics. I have also determined that a few should be available for development (road construction and timber harvest) to improve vegetation

conditions while providing for commodity production. Long- and short-term effects are detailed further in the FEIS Appendices, and the Planning Record.

Unavoidable Adverse Effects

Decisions made in the Revised Plan do not represent irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources. Any proposed disturbance to Forest resources cannot occur without further analysis and a decision document, and therefore the decision on this Revised Plan will result in no commitment of resources

During project implementation the application of Forest-wide standards and guidelines and resource protection measures limit the extent and duration of any adverse environmental impacts associated with management activities proposed under the guidance of this Revised Plan. For a detailed discussion of effects see Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative(s)

Regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require agencies to specify "the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable" (40 CFR 1505.2(b)).

Based on the description of the alternatives considered in detail in the FEIS and this ROD, I believe that the Revised Plan best meets the goals of Section 101 of the NEPA and is therefore the environmentally preferable alternative. The Revised Plan best addresses the primary risks to ecological integrity and the opportunities to minimize those risks, while providing sustainable goods and services to support local economies and lifestyles.

NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT (NFMA)

Planning Regulations

When the Sawtooth NF revision effort began in May of 1999, the Agency's 1982 planning regulations were in effect. On November 9, 2000, new planning rules were adopted. However, the 2000 planning rule allowed ongoing revisions to be completed under the 1982 rule if: 1) the revision had begun before the 2000 rule was issued, or 2) the notice that the draft environmental document was available was published in the *Federal Register* before May 10, 2001. The Sawtooth NF revision effort met both criteria and therefore proceeded under the 1982 planning regulations.

Net Public Benefit and Present Net Value

The NFMA requires identification of the alternative that maximizes the present net value (PNV) and how the Revised Plan compares to this (36 CFR 219.12(j)(2)). According to the economic analysis displayed in the FEIS, Alternative 5 maximizes both financial and economic PNV due to the higher level of timber harvest and livestock grazing predicted. The PNV (revenues minus costs) varies significantly between alternatives with revenue for Alternative 5 exceeding costs by more than double, to costs exceeding revenues by more than double for Alternative 6. Two alternatives have a negative PNV meaning that the cost of managing the forest resources exceeds inputs into the Treasury. Alternative 5 has the highest financial PNV (\$300 million) and Alternative 6 has the lowest (\$-132 million). The Revised Plan has a PNV of \$225 million.

While Alternative 5 maximizes PNV, the Revised Plan provides the highest net public benefit. Many benefits associated with the Revised Plan are not captured in fees or revenues nor are they necessarily quantifiable. For this reason, the alternative that maximizes PNV is not the alternative that has the highest net public benefit. I have determined that Alternative 7 has the highest net public benefit because it best balances multiple uses of the Forest and fulfills the mission of the Forest Service.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (E.O. 12898)

Executive Order 12898 (59 Fed. Register 7629, 1994) directs federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations.

I have determined from the analysis disclosed in the FEIS that the Revised Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (ESA)

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) creates an affirmative obligation "...that all Federal departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened [and proposed] species" of fish, wildlife, and plants. This obligation is further clarified in a National Interagency Memorandum of Agreement (dated August 30, 2000) which states our shared mission to "... enhance conservation of imperiled species while delivering appropriate goods and services provided by the lands and resources.

Based upon consultation with the USDI-FWS and NOAA Fisheries, findings in their respective Biological Opinions, and my commitment to meet obligations under ESA concerning conservation measures, reasonable and prudent measures, and terms and conditions, I have determined that the Revised Plan is in compliance with the ESA.

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT/EXECUTIVE ORDER 13186

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and as such does not authorize any site-specific activity. It includes direction to improve structure, composition, and pattern of vegetation cover types to move closer to proper functioning condition (Revised Plan, Chapter III). Potential impacts to habitat from proposed vegetation treatments will be analyzed at the site-specific project level. I have determined that management direction and monitoring plan are in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13186.

CLEAN AIR ACT

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Some prescribed burning may occur during implementation of the Revised Plan. According to analysis disclosed in the FEIS, all alternatives are expected to meet air quality standards. Compliance with mitigation measures and smoke management plans will result in no adverse long-term impacts (FEIS, Chapter 3, Air Quality and Smoke Management). Potential impacts will be analyzed at the project level and will comply with Idaho and Utah regulations. The Revised Plan protects air quality and complies with the rules, regulations, and permit procedures of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Idaho DEQ. Forest-wide direction included in Chapter III of the Revised Plan will ensure that air quality complies with the Clean Air Act and other state requirements. I have determined that the Revised Plan will comply with the provisions of the Clean Air Act.

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT (NHPA)

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Projects undertaken in response to the direction in this Revised Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources. The Revised Plan contains direction for cultural resource management including direction to more fully integrate cultural resource management with other management activities (Revised Plan, Chapter III).

Several other laws apply to preservation of cultural resources on federal land. Since the Revised Plan does not authorize ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) under the NHPA is not required. The Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes were consulted during development of this Revised Plan.

It is my determination that the Revised Plan complies with the NHPA and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources.

CLEAN WATER ACT

The objective of the Clean Water Act is to “...restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation’s waters.” One of the Act’s goals is to “...provide for the protection and propagation of fish, shellfish, and wildlife” and provide for “...recreation in and on the water” (33 U.S.C. 466 et seq., Title I, Section 101). Based on the analysis disclosed in the FEIS, the Revised Plan satisfies the Clean Water Act.

The Revised Plan contains Forest-wide direction to ensure management activities maintain or improve watershed conditions (Revised Plan, Chapter III, Desired Conditions, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines). Management direction including best management practices is designed to maintain or improve soil, water, riparian and aquatic resources, including beneficial uses. Cumulatively this direction will ensure continued compliance with the Clean Water Act (Revised Plan, Chapter III, Soil, Water, Riparian and Aquatic Resources).

ENERGY REQUIREMENT AND CONSERVATION POTENTIAL

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Because the scope of the proposed action is limited both in terms of geographic area and extent of activities, the FEIS (Chapter 3, Resource Commitments) explains that the Revised Plan will have little or no effect on current local energy use and offers no opportunity for energy conservation.

INVASIVE SPECIES (EXECUTIVE ORDER 13112)

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species directs that federal agencies should not authorize any activities that would increase the spread of invasive species. The Revised Plan includes direction designed to limit the spread of invasive species (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter III, Non-native Plants). The Revised Plan requires that integrated pest management methods be used to contain and control the spread of invasive species, following the R-4 Forest Service Handbook (FSH 2080). Therefore, I have determined the Revised Plan is in compliance with E.O. 13112.

PRIME FARMLAND, RANGELAND AND FOREST LAND

The Revised Plan complies with the Secretary of Agriculture’s Memorandum #1827, which requires conservation of prime farmland, rangeland, and forestland (see FEIS, Chapter 3, Resource

Commitments). This Revised Plan manages the Forest with sensitivity towards adjacent private and public land uses. It includes guidance to cooperate with adjacent and surrounding landowners when conducting management activities on the Forest. The guidance in the Revised Plan emphasizes coordination with other landowners to minimize impacts on their management.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY, EFFECTS ON MINORITIES, WOMEN

The Revised Plan will not have a disproportionate impact on any minority or low-income communities (FEIS, Chapter 3, Social and Economic Analysis). I have determined that the Revised Plan will not differentially affect the Civil Rights of any citizens, including women and minorities.

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. The Revised Plan contains direction for improvements in riparian areas and ensures compliance with State and Federal water quality standards. The Revised Plan describes desired conditions, sets goals, and establishes Riparian Conservation Areas specifically to maintain or improve conditions in these areas (Revised Plan, Chapter III, Resource Commitments, and Soil, Water, Riparian and Aquatic Resources). Therefore, I have determined that the Revised Plan will not have any adverse impacts on wetlands and floodplains.

OTHER POLICIES

The existing body of national direction for managing National Forests remains in effect. Standards and guidelines included in the Revised Plan provide direction specific to the Sawtooth NF. The Revised Plan provides direction contributing to the Forest Service Strategic Plan (GPRA, 2001) and Public Law 92-400, the enabling legislation for the Sawtooth National Recreation Area.

Implementation

How and when will the Revised Plan be implemented?

Implementation of this ROD may occur 30 calendar days after the Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision and Final EIS is published in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 219.10 (c)(1)). Implementation of the Revised Plan will be accomplished and tracked through the objectives detailed in Chapter III of the Revised Plan. These objectives will be used to help design the Forest's annual program of work. They will also be used to formulate out year budget requests.

Decisions on site-specific projects are not made in the Revised Plan. Those decisions will be made after site-specific analysis and appropriate documentation in compliance with NEPA.

Transition to the Revised Plan

Revised Plan direction will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the implementation date of this ROD.

There are many management actions that have decisions made before the implementation date of this ROD. The projected effects of these actions were part of the baseline analysis documented in the FEIS, Biological Assessment, and Biological Opinions for the Revised Plan.

The NFMA requires that "...permits, contracts, and other instruments for use and occupancy" of National Forest System lands be "consistent" with the Forest Plan (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)). In the context of a Revised Plan, NFMA specifically conditions this requirement in three ways:

1. These documents must be revised only "when necessary;"
2. These documents must be revised as "soon as practicable;"
3. Any revisions are "subject to valid existing rights."

I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the Revised Plan. These contracts will be executed according to their terms and these effects were disclosed in the FEIS. Existing timber contracts will, in most cases, have been completed within three years. The decision is left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other use and occupancy agreements are substantially longer than timber contracts. For example, grazing permits are generally issued for a 10-year term. It is my intention to bring Term Grazing Permits into compliance with the Revised Plan in a two-step process:

1. Upon approval of the Revised Plan, all grazing permits will be modified with a Standard Modification form, part 3 of the term grazing permit, as appropriate, to include applicable direction.

This includes, but may not be limited to, standards and guidelines for forage utilization and water and riparian resources.

2. When Allotment Management Plan NEPA documentation is completed per the Rescission Act (Public Law 104-19, section 504; July 27, 1995) schedule, additional direction from the project-specific NEPA document will be incorporated into the term grazing permit.

Other classes of “use and occupancy” agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan. Recent project decisions that have not yet been implemented will be reviewed and adjusted by the decision maker, if necessary, to meet the direction found in the Revised Plan.

The decision maker has the discretion, on a case-by-case basis, to modify pre-existing authorizations to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan standards and guidelines. I find that the statutory criteria of “as soon as practicable” and excepting “valid existing rights” useful in exercising that discretion.

Administrative Appeals of My Decision

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service within 90 days of the date that legal notice of this decision appears in the Idaho Statesman newspaper. Appeals must be sent to:

Regular Mail:

USDA Forest Service – Appeals Group
Attn: EMC Staff
Stop 1104
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington DC, 20250-1104

FedEx:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: EMC
201 14th Street SW
3rd Floor Central
Washington DC 20024

A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the deciding officer:

Regional Forester of the Intermountain Region
USDA - Forest Service
324 25th Street
Ogden, UT 84401

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made.

- The reasons for appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.
 - Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.
-

Contacts

Where can I obtain more information on this Forest Plan?

More information on the Final EIS and the Sawtooth NF Revised Plan can be obtained by contacting:

Ruth Monahan
Forest Supervisor
Sawtooth National Forest
(208) 737-3200

Sharon LaBrecque
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Sawtooth National Forest
(208) 737-3200

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Sawtooth National Forest
(208) 737-3200

Conclusion

For the past several years, Sawtooth NF personnel have worked with members of the public, elected officials and other agencies to produce this Revised Plan. I am pleased to make my decision based upon solid relationships that have evolved through coordination and cooperation to ensure sustainable conditions for the ecological and human environments on the Sawtooth NF.

The Revised Plan evolved from alternatives formed from the best available science and the work of a dedicated interdisciplinary team of Forest Service employees. However, science does not always provide definitive answers to complex resource management topics nor can any one field of science provide all the answers. Yet science can offer insight into the effects of management decisions and actions. In other words, good science can "clear the fog" and let us see which choice best lets us reach our goals.

The challenge that remains before all of us is to work together to implement the Revised Plan. I fully understand that this particular goal can be difficult to achieve. But at the same time, I am confident that cooperation will unite us, because I believe that the concern we all have for the Forest is our common bond - that these lands remain productive and splendid - not only for the current generation, but for future generations as well.



JACK G. TROYER
Regional Forester, Intermountain Region

JUL 25 2003

Date